

# THE HISTORIAN

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

*Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi*

August 1998

The August Meeting of the Hancock County Historical Society will be held at noon on Thursday, August 20 at the Kate Lobrano House, 108 Cue Street, Bay Saint Louis.

Guest speaker will be Roland Schexnayder of Waveland, who is a retired Louisiana educator. Mr. Schexnayder will discuss John Law who was given a 25 year charter in 1717 to colonize the territory of Louisiana.

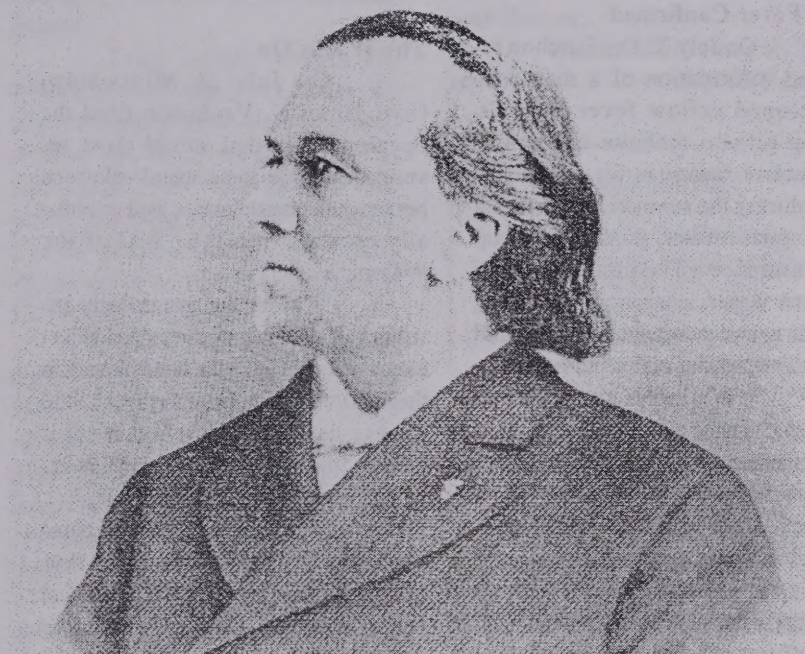
Call 467-4090 for luncheon reservations at \$6.00. Please call early to assure your reservation and to help us plan seating.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The past month has been exceptionally busy at Lobrano House, due mostly to the publication of our book, *Bay Saint Louis, The First 300 Years*. The Keystone Cops gave the appearance of better organization than we. However, production is now in full swing and we have sent out more than five hundred copies, reducing our backlog of orders to about two hundred fifty at this time.

Books are now available at Lobrano House and we will soon begin placing them for sale in shops and stores across the Coast. They will be great Christmas gifts for family and friends who live "away".

Father Bob from Saint Au-  
(see **President**, page 3)



Governor James K. Vardaman, 1904-1908.

## THE LOUISIANA-MISSISSIPPI WAR OF 1905

In the 1890s the South endured annual plagues of yellow fever, borne by the *Stegomyia Fasciatus* mosquito. Even though the Army Yellow Fever Commission headed by Maj. Walter Reed confirmed in 1901 the hypothesis of Cuban scientist Dr. Carlos Juan Finlay that yellow fever was caused by a mosquito, most of the South ignored its implications. Mosquito control was difficult and expensive, especially in the marshy coast lands and the proliferation of cisterns and stagnant pools where the

insect bred.

Yellow fever was reported as early as May 1905 in New Orleans. But the news didn't reach Mississippi until July 22 when Dr. John F. Hunter, secretary of the Mississippi State Board of Health announced that he had learned from "a private source" of its existence. Once confirmed, Dr. Hunter ordered a state quarantine against the City of New Orleans. Authorities in Mississippi, Alabama and Texas charged that the Louisiana State Board of Health had been reluctant to announce the presence of the fever, and each established quarantines. Loui-



iana felt that these reactions were extreme, and Edward Sanchon, president of the Louisiana State Board of Health and Quitman Kohnke, City of New Orleans Health Officer, announced that the two deaths cited could not be attributed to the fever until autopsies were conducted.

### The Fever Confirmed

On July 22 Dr. Sanchon released information of a man who developed yellow fever near St. Philip Street. Kohnke announced preventive measures for citizens to take during the summer: eliminating all stagnant water, putting a teacup of "insurance oil" on the surface of cistern water, cesspool and privy vaults, and mosquito nets on beds and screens on doors and windows.

While Texas and Alabama declared interstate quarantines and Louisiana communities adopted intrastate quarantines against New Orleans, it was the Mississippi quarantine that caused particular concern to New Orleanians, since many of them sent their families to the Mississippi Gulf Coast for the summer. Within two days the Coast's hotels and cottages were empty.

The Jackson *Clarion Ledger* reported on July 25 that Pass Christian, Bay St. Louis, Gulfport and others around the Coast complained that the quarantine was discriminatory and "have almost threatened to secede from the state if the Health Board does not permit citizens of New Orleans to visit their families in Coast towns." Their appeal was denied.

Louisiana governor Newton C. Blanchard held a conference attended by representatives from Louisiana, New Orleans, Texas, Tennessee and U.S. Public Health & Marine Hospital Service. The consensus was that the epidemic had

slowed and mosquito control measures adopted.

Despite the prevention campaign underway, in Mississippi the quarantine was in place, detention camps under construction and state and federal agencies cooperating. New Orleans settled in for the siege, expected to be brief.

### The War is On

On July 26 Mississippi Gov. James K. Vardaman fired the opening salvo that would most severely damage the cordial relations between the sister states and eventually escalate into the "War of the Waters."

"Epidemics are usually resultant of placing commercial interests above the public health, and in the effort to suppress the truth, the disease gets a foothold and ere it is known, the whole community is infected with it," Vardaman said.

Mississippi military personnel, under Adjutant General Arthur Fridge were sent to the Gulf Coast and Louisiana borders with orders to maintain the quarantine "at the point of a bayonet." Thus began the "shot-gun quarantine." S.G. Thigpen recalled that when Justice John Seal started to Bay Springs with a prisoner, he was given ten minutes by a quarantine guard to turn around or he and his prisoner would be shot.

While the governors of Louisiana and Mississippi were exchanging recriminations, Surgeon Eugene Wasdin of the U.S. Public Health and Marine Hospital Service had been placed in charge of the maritime quarantine along the Gulf, using the U.S. revenue cutter *Winona* to assist Mississippi authorities in preventing the landing of vessels from New Orleans and sending quarantine violators to Ship Island for detention and fumigation.

### The Quarantine

Mississippi quarantine boats lay at anchor in the Rigolets to waylay outbound schooners. The powerboat *Grace* and a boat from the Biloxi oyster fleet had detained 118 vessels until the *Wynona* arrived to tow them to Ship Island. One schooner even entered Lake Borgne, in Louisiana territory, with enough "arrogant usurpation of authority than would make even a pirate blink," said the *Daily Picayune*. While Louisiana and federal authorities ordered an investigation, some St. Bernard Parish residents were recommending outfitting a tug with cannon and firing at any vessel entering Louisiana waters. Meanwhile, numerous Mississippi citizens went to Jackson to volunteer to fight.

The Jackson *Clarion Ledger* managed a touch of levity: "The Louisiana fleet is commanded by Captain Fasciata Stegomia, while the Mississippi squadron is directed by Admiral Stegomie. They have buzzed around each other all day, but so far neither side has been able to penetrate the cuticle of one or puncture the hide of the other."

Gov. Blanchard ordered armed vessels to Lake Borgne, Chef Menteur, the Rigolets and the mouth of the Pearl River. "It is not my purpose to make an offensive movement against Mississippi," he said. But "to protect rights of Louisiana fishermen and boatmen who have been harassed, annoyed and assailed by Mississippi quarantine guards."

### Constitutional Violation

The *Daily Picayune* favored asking the federal government to "call off the sea dogs and give Louisiana oystermen a chance to earn a living...Louisiana could tackle the Mississippi navy, but when the grim smuggler-hunters of the U. S. bear



down upon our oyster squadrons, they must haul down their colors and surrender."

What especially angered the Louisiana fishermen was that armed soldiers had crossed the Pearl River and were hanging around in Louisiana territory. This "armed invasion" of Mississippians thereby violated the Constitution of the United States which forbade an armed force of one state from entering another without first securing permission.

### Uncle Sam Steps In

While the conflict raged, yellow fever spread. On August 4 a conference of leading citizens resolved to ask the federal government to take control. Governor Brandon and New Orleans Mayor Martin Behrman wired President Theodore Roosevelt asking assistance. Many citizens expressed concern about the threat of federal invasion on states' rights.

The Louisiana-Mississippi Quarantine War of 1905 ended in recriminations, criticism, convoluted explanations of who was to blame, and defense of state sovereignty. Federal authority had placed itself between the two combatants and an armistice reigned.

### The Death Toll

There were no battle casualties in the War of the Waters. But the 1905 yellow fever epidemic, the last the South experienced, left 870 cases with 70 deaths in Mississippi, and 9,321 cases and 988 deaths in Louisiana.

(The foregoing is a condensation of "The War of the Waters: the Louisiana-Mississippi Quarantine War of 1905" by Marshall Scott Legan, *The Journal of Mississippi History*, June 1988, pp. 89-111.)

Subliminal Message

Lend Photographs to the Historical Society

President, from page 1

gustine Seminary brought us copies of their publication *Divine Word Messenger* from 1931 through 1963. There are literally hundreds of issues giving detailed accounts of the works and accomplishments of the priests and students at Saint Augustine during that period. This is a great new research resource at the Lobrano House.

Mary Leigh Weston donated a photograph of her father, the late J. Roland Weston who was president of the Mississippi Historical Society in 1958. We always welcome photographs of Hancock County citizens and are especially appreciative of this one because of his historical interests.

Nancy Blancé brought us a copy of *Bay St. Louis, Celebrating 100 Years of Incorporation*, which we plan to scan and reproduce in the near future. This copy is in excellent condition and will insure better reproduction than the copies we have.

Stop in the office and visit us: better yet, stop in the office and help us.

CHARLES GRAY

### THE FSM CLUB

One afternoon a month for the past four or five years, anywhere from four to a dozen of our loyal members gather at the Lobrano House. Not for tea. For work.

They call themselves the FSM Club for "Fold, Spindle and Mutilate." Their task is to prepare up to 500 issues of *The Historian* for mailing by folding, inserting, sealing, addressing, sorting.

The membership has varied as some have moved away, left for health reasons or family needs, and new volunteers have taken their place.

High time we recognized these dedicated souls:

Mary Bowers, Mickey Burns, Ruth Carlson, Ruth Chambers, Marine Collins, Patt Cucullu, Melba Felder, Bill Flores, JoAnn Mumme George, Rick George, Ruth Good, Evie Gordon, Linda Henrie, Marlene Johnson, Valerie Laine, Dorothea Martin, Lee Purcell and Jean Reeves.

Thanks for making my job easier.  
EDITH BACK

### NEW MEMBERS

Oscar Barabino, Elk Grove, CA  
Sandra Barabino, Elk Grove, CA  
Virginia Butler, Waveland  
Mrs. Donald Landry, Kiln  
Kristin Franckiewicz, Ann Arbor, MI  
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## HISTORIAN

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Publisher Charles H. Gray  
Editor Edith Back

Published monthly by the

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HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

108 Cue Street or P.O. Box 312  
Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi 39520

Telephone / Fax: 228-467-4090  
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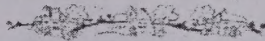


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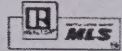
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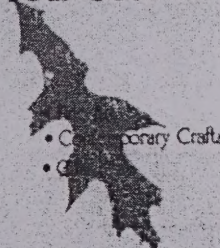
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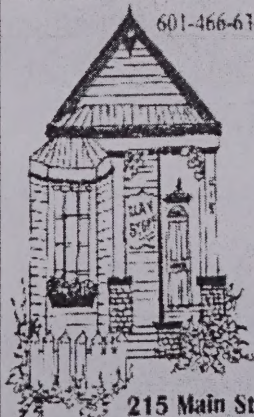


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